

# Chemical Safety for Food Workers

Today many people work in the preparation and service of food in hotels, restaurants and fast food outlets. Others work in catering facilities, commercial kitchens and other food service facilities, such as those in hospitals and schools.

There are a number of chemicals which these workers may come into contact with, for example cleaning agents such as oven cleaners and detergents. Contact with some of these chemicals can result in adverse health effects such as burns, irritation to the eyes, nose and throat, skin problems such as dermatitis and respiratory problems such as asthma.

Some of the chemicals that food service workers commonly use are listed below along with their possible health effects. Chemical ingredients in a product can be checked by reading the label.



Product	Chemical ingredients	Potential health effects
<b>Oven cleaners</b>	<i>Sodium hydroxide (caustic soda)</i> <i>Ethanolamine</i> <i>Diethylene glycol</i>	Eye, skin and respiratory tract irritation Skin burns from concentrated solution Dermatitis from repeated contact
<b>Floor cleaners</b> <b>Dishwasher soap</b>	<i>Quarternary ammoniums alkaline salts</i>	Skin burns Dermatitis Corrosive irritation to eyes, respiratory tract and skin
<b>Degreasers</b>	<i>Various organic solvents</i>	Eye, skin and respiratory tract irritation Headaches, nausea and dizziness
<b>Bleach</b>	<i>Sodium hypochlorite (can release chlorine gas which is a severe irritant)</i>	Eye, skin and respiratory tract irritation Burns Skin allergy

This Fact Sheet aims to help food service workers in making sure that any chemicals used at the workplace are safe and will not affect your health

## What action can be taken?

The *NSW Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000* and the *NSW Occupational Health and Safety Regulation 2001* requires employers to ensure that workers are protected from any health effects from chemicals used at work. This means providing workers with information on chemicals used at, assessing any health risks and taking appropriate action to control any risks.

Workers can also be actively involved in making sure that they are protected:

- **Ask your supervisor** about any health effects from the chemicals you use.
- **Read the label** on the container and follow any safety instructions.
- **Get a Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS)** on the product - employers should store MSDS for all products in a register and make it available to all workers.

- **Store all chemicals** according to instructions and seal containers when not in use.
- **Dispose of all empty containers** of chemicals properly.
- **Ensure that there is good ventilation** in the area that the chemical is used. Windows may need to be kept open for natural ventilation or an extraction fan may be needed to remove fumes.
- **Ensure that suitable training** or advice is provided on how to use, store, handle and dispose of all chemicals used
- **Use personal protective equipment** such as gloves, masks, goggles or aprons as needed - make sure that they are the proper type and fit to provide effective protection.

If you have any concerns about the chemicals you use at work, you should contact your OHS committee representative or the union delegate at work.

**For further information and advice contact the Workers Health Centre**



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*For further information and advice ring us on 02 9749 7666*

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